

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Background

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) conducted this study to identify a set of roadway improvements on State Route 316/University Parkway in the study area of Gwinnett, Barrow, and Oconee Counties eligible to be included in GDOT’s State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). This is the first step in the process of getting a major transportation improvement project funded and scheduled. This requires documentation of proposed project’s purpose, need, concept layout, project costs, benefits and the identification of issues that will need to be addressed in subsequent design and environmental studies.

SR 316 is an important regional roadway. Local governments as well as members of the State Legislature have taken notice of transportation conditions in the SR 316 Corridor. Chairmen of the Board of Commissioners from Gwinnett County, Barrow County and Oconee County signed a joint resolution stating their shared vision for a safer SR 316/University Parkway. Moreover, they urged the State to pursue sources of state and federal funding to implement those improvements. A joint Georgia House and Senate Legislative Study Committee for SR 316, was formed to investigate safety and mobility concerns that were brought to their attention. The University Parkway Alliance is interested in improvements to the corridor.

Based upon GDOT’s previous planning efforts for the corridor, the extent of improvements needed to fully address safety and mobility needs in the corridor suggest that funding will be a critical issue for implementation. The corridor is 40 miles long, includes three counties and three different local planning jurisdictions. The study recognizes that any proposed improvements will likely impact a broad spectrum of individuals, businesses and branches of government. In light of the potential impacts, public involvement and participation in the planning stages was essential to gain the support needed for adoption of recommendations developed by this study into local, regional and statewide transportation plans. A map of the study area showing County and City jurisdictions in the corridor is shown in Figure 1-1.

SR 316 is the central transportation artery of one of Georgia's fastest growing corridors. The area includes several institutions of higher learning: the Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, Emory University, Gwinnett Tech, University Center in Gwinnett as well as the University of Georgia. This area is promoted by the State of Georgia and local economic development organizations as an attractive place for high technology and light industrial businesses to start, expand, or relocate. The corridor's main asset in terms of being able to make "high tech" companies successful is its proximity to workers with "high tech" skills.

1.2 Study Purpose

In response to concerns about safety from local governments, the State Legislature, and the general public, the study included a comprehensive investigation of accidents in the corridor. In addition, the study focused on congestion, economic development and system-wide integration with other transportation improvements proposed in the corridor (including new Gwinnett bus service, proposed commuter rail service, existing local airports, and new HOV lanes on I-85). The study's findings include a prioritized list of recommended projects, implementation scenarios based on the recommended funding plans, and the need to coordinate with other transportation and land-use plans in the corridor.

The study developed the following products for inclusion in the final report:

- Documentation of the purpose and need for improvements based on existing and future conditions;
- Description of the assessment process used to identify potential improvement strategies for further detailed study;
- Documentation of findings from the evaluation of alternatives;
- Identification of potential funding source(s) for project implementation;
- Description of the Corridor’s improvement concept;
- Coordination with other planned improvements, plans and programs within the Corridor;
- Documentation of the public involvement process including its proactive efforts to inform and involve the general public during the study process; and,
- Description of issues that will require further detailed investigation as specific projects proceed into the preliminary engineering phase.

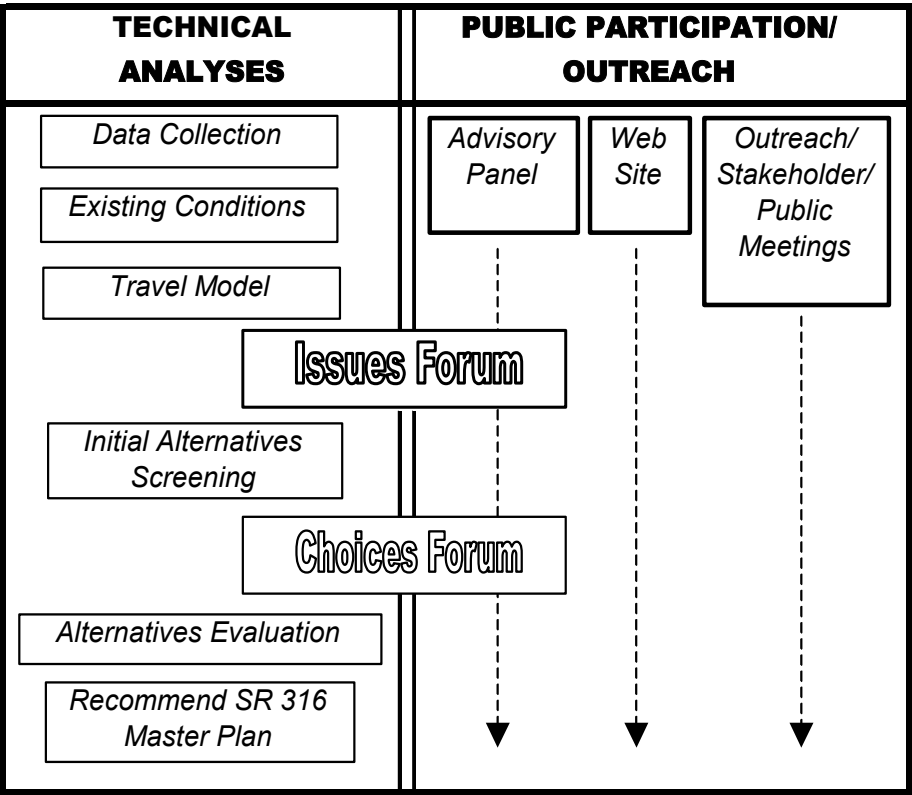
1.3 Study Methodology

In addition to analyses of safety, congestion and economic development, the study contained substantial public information and local coordination activities. This was important because the study area encompasses several different planning jurisdictions that each has different transportation providers, local elected officials, and local planning agencies. Therefore, for the study to effectively investigate the needs of a 40-mile long transportation corridor required the extensive involvement and coordination with the following organizations:

- Atlanta Regional Commission
- Athens-Clarke County Regional Transportation Study
- Northeast Georgia Regional Development Council
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
- Federal Highway Administration
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Gwinnett County
- Barrow County
- Oconee County

A clear formulation of the purpose and need was an important element in building consensus for the study’s recommended improvements to the SR 316 corridor. A graphical overview of the principal activities performed during this study is depicted in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-2
Study Methodology Diagram



State Route 316 Corridor Study

Figure 1-1
Study Area Map

